

Historic registration to be sought for oldest black church in city

The oldest standing black church in Baltimore, and possibly in the state, will seek to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Committee for the Preservation of the Orchard Street Methodist Church announced the plans yesterday. The back section of the building at Orchard and Biddle streets was erected in 1837 and the sanctuary was added in 1853.

Inclusion in the National Register would provide federal funds for restoration of the religious landmark, which has been vacant for over a year and, according to a member of the committee, "totally vandalized."

Until five or six months ago,

said Franklin C. Snowell, Executive Director of the Maryland Commission on Negro History, it was "assumed" that the city would eventually demolish the church. At that time several citizens became interested in preserving the facility. Now, he says, the city has assured concerned preservationists that it has no plans to tear down the structure.

"Removed by collectors"

Mr. Snowell called the damage to the Orchard Street Church the result of "sophisticated vandalism."

"You can look inside and see it hasn't been the typical juvenile type looting and breakage," he said. "Most of the

things—stained glass, bannisters, furnishings, have been carefully removed by collectors, Bolton Hill people who wanted them for their own restoration projects."

According to Mr. Snowell, plans are to purchase the old church from the city and restore it to its original state, possibly for use as a historical museum and cultural center.